



June 19, 2001

Ms. Frances Smith
Hospital Administrator
Childress Regional Medical Center
P.O. Box 1257
Childress, Texas 79201

OR2001-2606

Dear Ms. Smith:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 148533.

The Childress Regional Medical Center (the "medical center") received a request for information relating to the number of medical center employees who resigned or who were terminated for the years 1995 through 2001. You assert that the requested information is not subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act.

If a governmental body wishes to withhold from public disclosure information that has been requested, then it must ask for a decision from the attorney general and raise the applicable exceptions within ten business days after the governmental body receives the written request for information. Gov't Code § 552.301(a), (b). This office did not receive the medical center's request for a decision within the ten business day period mandated by section 552.301(b). Based on your letter of March 29, 2001, the medical center received the request for information on March 29, 2001, but the medical center's request for a decision was postmarked April 13, 2001. Moreover, the medical center has failed to comply with section 552.301 by its failure to state the exceptions that apply to withhold the information from public disclosure.

The requested information is presumed to be public information when a governmental body does not comply with section 552.301. Gov't Code § 552.302. In order to overcome the presumption that the requested information is public information, a governmental body must provide compelling reasons why the information should not be disclosed. *Id.*; *Hancock v.*

State Bd. of Ins., 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ); *see* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). You have not raised any specific compelling reasons to overcome the presumption that the information is public. Thus, we conclude that the information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yen-Ha Le".

Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/db/seg

Ref: ID# 148533

cc: Ms. Chick Steed
P.O. Box 240
Childress, Texas 79201